

## Use and Usefulness of Monolingual, Bilingual and Semi-bilingual Decoding Dictionaries in Pakistan: A Comparative Study

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### Abstract

Theoretical lexicography is concerned with scholarly studies in such disciplines as linguistics, especially Lexicology (Hartman & James, 2002). Research into theoretical lexicography covers dictionary criticism, dictionary history, dictionary needs analysis, dictionary structure, dictionary typology, and dictionary use. The present paper is related to dictionary typology and dictionary use. It presents a comparison of the use and usefulness of three types of the decoding dictionaries used by learners and recommended by teachers of the English language in Pakistan. The methodology applied for the present research is qualitative and descriptive in approach. However, it also presents the results in percentages in order to compensate for the subjectivity of qualitative approach and to reach objective conclusions. The participants of the research include 400 students and 25 teachers belonging to different universities and colleges in Pakistan. Questionnaire as a data collection tool has been exploited for the current research. The comparative results of the three types of decoding dictionaries reveal that the learners mainly utilise two types of dictionaries, i.e. semi-bilingual (L2-L2-L1) English to English, and Urdu dictionary with a slight edge over monolingual (L2-L2) English to English dictionary. The research also finds that the learners of English in Pakistan less frequently make use of bilingual (L2-L1) English to Urdu dictionary.

*Keywords:* theoretical lexicography, dictionary use, decoding dictionary, monolingual, bilingual, semibilingual

### 1. Introduction

A dictionary is of vital importance for learning and teaching of any foreign language. In Pakistan, English has the status of an official language along with Urdu. It is taught as a foreign language. Different types of decoding and encoding dictionaries are used by the learners. These dictionaries include monolingual, bilingual and semi-bilingual or bilingualised dictionaries.

The paper in hand presents a research conducted in a purely nonnative English setting. It focuses on the comparison of the use and usefulness of a monolingual English to English dictionary (henceforth EED), a bilingual English to Urdu dictionary (henceforth EUD), and a semi-bilingual English to English and Urdu dictionary (henceforth EEUD) for the learners of the English language in Pakistan. This study is the result of one of the aspects of the PhD project accomplished by the principal author. The main project was concerned with the use and usefulness of dictionaries in general and semi-bilingual EEUD in particular.

Keeping in view the topic and the nature of its research, a mixed method approach is utilised. Applying survey method, questionnaire is used as a tool for collecting information from four hundred students and twenty-five teachers belonging to different universities and colleges in Pakistan. The analyses of the collected data are presented in the qualitative descriptive form. At the same time, the participants' responses to the closed-ended questions are quantitatively analysed and presented in graphs.

## 2. Review of Literature

A review of the relevant literature is presented in this part of the paper, which will create a link between the previous and the present studies related to the use and usefulness of dictionaries.

### 2.1. Types of Dictionaries

Different perspectives are considered to determine the dictionary types. These perspectives are the size, coverage and depth of content, time reference, format and arrangement, functionality, medium of production, and level and skills of the users (Atkins & Rundell, 2008). The paper in hand focuses the types of dictionary related to the coverage of language and functionality.

#### 2.1.1. *Types of dictionaries according to language coverage*

Types of dictionaries according to language coverage include monolingual, bilingual, multilingual, and semi-bilingual or bilingualised dictionaries. A monolingual dictionary provides all kinds of information about the headwords in the same language. This kind of dictionary is the first source of reference for the native speakers of any language.

A bilingual dictionary covers the vocabulary of two languages. It provides meanings of words in another language. According to Zgusta (1971), the basic purpose of a bilingual dictionary is to coordinate the lexical units of one language with those of another language which are equivalent in their lexical meaning.

A multilingual dictionary presents the vocabularies of more than two languages by giving meanings of all the languages covered. Terminological dictionary is an example of this type of dictionary. It provides vocabulary of various disciplines across languages developed as a result of some international standardization of the technical terms and definitions (Hartmann & James, 2002). A multilingual dictionary is also named as a 'plurilingual dictionary' (Sterkenburg, 2003, p. 409).

A semi-bilingual or bilingualised dictionary 'contains headwords and definitions in one language and translation equivalents in the other language' (Hartmann & James, 2002). It features the qualities of two types of dictionaries, monolingual and bilingual. The terms 'bilingualised dictionary' and 'semi-bilingual dictionary' are alternately used for the same type of dictionary. A semi-bilingual dictionary provides the main information like the headword, part of speech, definition, example of usage in English, and in addition to that, 'each meaning of the headword has a brief translation in the learner's native language' (Kernerman Dictionaries). Semi-bilingual dictionaries have been the subject of investigation in studies like Laufer and Melamed (1994), Nakamoto (1995), Laufer and Hadar (1997), Marelllo (1998), Thumb (2004), Lew (2004), and many more.

### 2.1.2. *Types of dictionaries according to the functionality*

The purposes of the use of dictionaries determine the classification of dictionaries according to their functionality. The examples include encoding dictionary and decoding dictionary. A decoding dictionary helps perceive a language. It provides the meanings of lexical items a user may need to understand a text. Monolingual dictionaries mainly serve the purpose of a decoding dictionary. A bilingual dictionary also helps in improving the receptive skills of the users. They utilise it in reading and listening contexts, and also in translating a text from foreign language into their own language. Decoding dictionaries are also termed as *passive dictionaries* (Hartmann & James, 2002). On the other hand, an encoding dictionary helps the users with encoding tasks. A thesaurus is an example of encoding dictionary. It gives the lexical options for encoding a message in writing or speaking. A bilingual encoding dictionary fulfils the requirements of the users for translating the native language into the target language. According to Hartmann and James, this type of dictionary is also termed as *active dictionary* (p. 3).

The research in hand is concerned with monolingual, bilingual, and semi-bilingual decoding dictionaries.

## 2.2. Research Into the Use and Usefulness of Dictionaries

The usefulness of dictionaries for the learners has been a subject of study for theoretical lexicographers since the beginning of the research in this area. Barnhart (1962) conducted the first important study in this context. His study was based on the teachers' observation about their students' dictionary-using habits. Although his study is considered a milestone in dictionary research, it did not involve dictionary users themselves. Tomaszczyk (1979) focussed actual dictionary users involving students, teachers, and translators. He was the first researcher to examine the dictionary needs of nonnative speakers of English. Questionnaire was used by him as a tool for data collection. His study, conducted in Polish and American contexts, found that the bilingual dictionaries were preferred by the participants.

Hartmann (1983) conducted a research into the use of bilingual dictionaries. The participants of his study were 118 learners of German and 17 teachers. He used questionnaire to collect data. He found out that the learners utilised a bilingual dictionary mainly for the purpose of translation. The other contexts of the use of this type of dictionary were reading and writing. He also pointed out that the subjects of his study did not have enough training for using a dictionary.

The differences and the effectiveness of three types of dictionaries, i.e. monolingual, bilingual, and bilingualised were studied by Laufer and Melamed (1994). Their study involved EFL learners' comprehension and production of fifteen low frequency words in English. They found that "the bilingualised dictionary was significantly more effective than the other two" (Laufer & Melamed, 1994, p. 575).

Nonnative learners of the English language as users of dictionary were involved as participants in a study conducted by Robert Lew in 2004. A broad sample of 712 Polish learners

of the English language and an unspecified number of teachers participated in this study. He used questionnaire and designed a test to collect data for his study. He utilised monolingual, bilingual, or semi-bilingual dictionaries for the 'Dictionary Effectiveness Test'. He found that the bilingual dictionaries were used more often than the monolingual dictionaries, but the participants gave higher ratings to monolingual dictionaries than the bilingual dictionaries. His study also revealed that the effectiveness of dictionaries increased as the users moved to higher levels. In conclusion to his study, he questioned the validity of the educators' recommendation of the supposed superiority of monolingual dictionary. He was of the view that there was hardly any empirical evidence to support this supposed dogma. According to him, 'if any evidence was available, it pointed to the more effectiveness of the use of bilingual dictionary for reception purposes.' (Lew, 2004, p. 179).

In the backdrop of the studies discussed above, the research in hand has been designed to find out the use and usefulness of decoding dictionaries by the learners of English in Pakistan. It involved students being the direct users of dictionaries, and teachers as the indirect observers. Since the comparative study of the use and usefulness of monolingual EED, bilingual EUD, and the semi-bilingual EEUD in Pakistani context has not gained the attention of the theoretical lexicographer so far, the present study is an attempt to fill this gap.

### **3. Research Methodology**

Mixed method approach has been applied for the present study. It is qualitative descriptive in approach. Describing, recording, analysing and interpreting the existing condition is called a qualitative descriptive research. This type of research deals with the existing trends in a point of time. Singh (2005) believes that qualitative descriptive research uses non quantitative methods and systematic procedures to discover nonquantifiable relationship between existing variables. A qualitative descriptive research has its own limitations due to the subjectivity involved on the part of the researcher. However, this subjectivity of can be lessened by the addition of specific results in quantitative form. In order to reach objective conclusions, the study in hand presents the analyses of the responses of the participants to the closed-ended questions in percentages. Subsections to follow provide details of the methodology involved in its concept and framework.

#### **3.1. Research Question**

Since the present study is concerned with the comparative use and usefulness of three types of decoding dictionaries, it seeks to find an answer to the question: Which type(s) of dictionary(ies) out of monolingual, bilingual, and semi-bilingual is/are utilised by the learners of the English language in Pakistan?

#### **3.2. Participants of the Research**

The participants of this study were the students majoring in English language and literature from different universities and colleges of Pakistan. Four hundred students, consisting of 246 female and 156 male, came from various linguistic backgrounds. They used their local or regional languages in routine communication. English was not the mother tongue of any of

the participants, and a large number of the participants did not even communicate in Urdu for general purposes in their daily lives. However, all of them were competent to use Urdu. It is noteworthy that a number of participants had switched over to Urdu from their mother tongue at school age. The participants had been learning the English language for many years.

Majority of the participants enjoyed the availability of dictionary(ies) at their home and educational institutes and they were conscious of the importance of dictionaries as reference material. They had been using different types of dictionaries for a number of years for learning of the English language.

Teachers, as indirect observers of students using dictionaries, have also contributed to this study with their invaluable opinion. Using questionnaire, the data were collected from twenty-five teachers of the English language belonging to different universities and colleges in Pakistan.

### **3.3. Data Collection**

The main data collection procedure for this study was the survey using the tool of questionnaire, which had been one of the favourite tools among the researchers in lexicography. Although questionnaire has been criticised as a data collection technique in dictionary research by theoretical lexicographers like Hatherall (1984), “it continues to be used as a major tool in any research concerned with people” (Diab, 1990). Considering the widespread use of questionnaire, Robert Lew re-examined the use of questionnaire in dictionary research. He supported its use and asserted that the “other methods should not supplant but rather supplement questionnaires” (Lew, 2002, p. 270). Researchers like Diab, 1990; Iqbal, 1987; Kipfer, 1985; Hartman, 1983; Bejoint, 1981; Tomaszczyk, 1979; Quirk, 1973; Barnhart, 1962) have utilised questionnaire as a tool to collect data in studying dictionary use.

Following the trend set by the researchers studying dictionary use, questionnaire as a data collection tool was exploited for the study in hand to find the relative significance of the three types of dictionaries mentioned above. Questionnaire for this study has been designed keeping in view the suggestions put forward by Lew (2002). Considering the limitations and flaws of questionnaire, informal unstructured interviews were also conducted after administering the questionnaire. Iqbal (1987) and Diab (1990) have utilised interview as a tool along with questionnaire for their studies concerned with dictionary use. Along with these, the participant observation, which is an integral part of any kind of qualitative research, has also been helpful.

#### **3.3.1. Questionnaire for learners of English**

Questionnaire used for the main project was designed to draw out information about the learner’s dictionary use in general, owning a dictionary and frequency of using a dictionary, and the helpfulness of information available in a particular kind of dictionary. It also included the usefulness of a semi-bilingual EEUD. However, this paper presents analysis of one of the sections of the questionnaire in which the learners were asked to opine about the importance and usefulness of different types of dictionaries for their learning of the English language. The

unstructured interviews conducted immediately after administering the questionnaires to crosscheck the responses of the participants have also been made part of the analyses.

### **3.3.2. *Questionnaire for teachers of English***

Another questionnaire was administered among the teachers to note their opinion on the use and usefulness of different types of dictionaries. The questionnaire designed for teachers for the main project consisted of four sections. However, the present paper reveals the results of the responses to only the section concerned with the teachers' preference for a specific kind of dictionary. The questionnaire also contained open-ended questions where the teachers were asked to give reasons for their recommendation of a particular type of dictionary. The analyses of the teachers' responses to the closed-ended questions have been shown in percentages that are supported by the qualitative discussion.

## **4. Results**

The results discussed in the sections to follow are based on the analyses of data collected from participant students and teachers of the English language. The analyses of the questionnaire for students and teachers have been presented and discussed separately and conclusions are drawn by combining the results.

### **4.1. Learners' Questionnaire**

The questionnaire administered for collecting data from the participants consisted of different questions related to the use and usefulness of the three types of dictionaries, namely, monolingual, bilingual and semi-bilingual. The data collected from the participants have been analysed and the results are presented below.

#### **4.1.1. *Learners' need for more than one dictionary***

The participants were asked whether they used more than one dictionary in order to find the same kind of information. In response to this question, 76% (i.e. 303 out of 393) of the participants responded in positive. High percentage indicates that the learners of the English language in Pakistan require more than one dictionary to satiate their vocabulary needs.

#### **4.1.2. *Types of dictionary(ies) used***

The analysis reveals that participant students used all the three types of dictionaries in question. There were 340 students who used an EED (i.e. mono-lingual L2-L2 dictionary). There were 370 learners who said that they used an EEUD (i.e. semi-bilingual L2-L2-L1 dictionary). Then there were 216 students who told that they utilised an EUD (i.e. bilingual L2-L1 dictionary). The line graph (Figure 1) shows an analysis of the comparison of the number of participant learners using three types of decoding dictionaries.

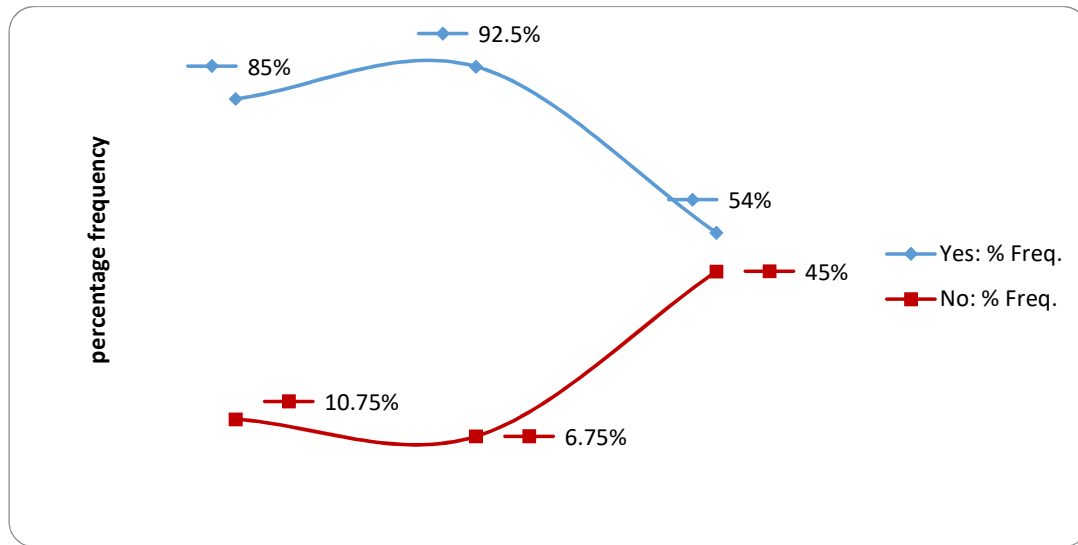


Figure 1. Comparison of the number of users of decoding dictionaries

The graph (Figure 1) illustrates a comparison of the number of participant users of decoding dictionaries. The frequencies shown in the graph depict the percentage taken out of the total number of participants, i.e. 400. The movement of graph line shows that majority of the participants used an EEUD to cater for their learning needs. Number of such users was more than 90% of the participants of this research. The monolingual EED was the next most favoured dictionary. A large number of participants, i.e. 85%, utilised this type of dictionary. A bilingual EUD was at the third place with 54% participant users of this type of dictionary. According to the participant learners, they have been using these types of dictionaries for a long period of time.

#### 4.1.3. Frequency of using different kinds(s) of dictionary(ies)

One of the questions was concerned with seeking information about the frequency of using three types of dictionaries. In the form of a Likert<sup>1</sup> scale, the participant students were given five options, from 'daily' to 'not at all'. The response data about using three types of decoding dictionaries reveal that monolingual EED was daily used by 24% participants, and it was used twice a week by 28% respondents. As far as the semi-bilingual EEUD was concerned, a large number, i.e. 56% students made use of it daily, and 19% participant learners consulted it twice a week. On the other hand, a bilingual EUD was daily used by 15% of the respondents, while 6% used it twice a week, and 45% of the participants never used this type of dictionary. In order to draw a comparison of the frequency of the use of three kinds of dictionaries, the percentages of the responses are presented in line graph (Figure 2).

<sup>1</sup> The Likert scale, introduced in the 1930s and associated with Renesis Likert, is a rating scale used to measure the strength of agreement to the clearly worded statements, and to find answers to the questions in research.

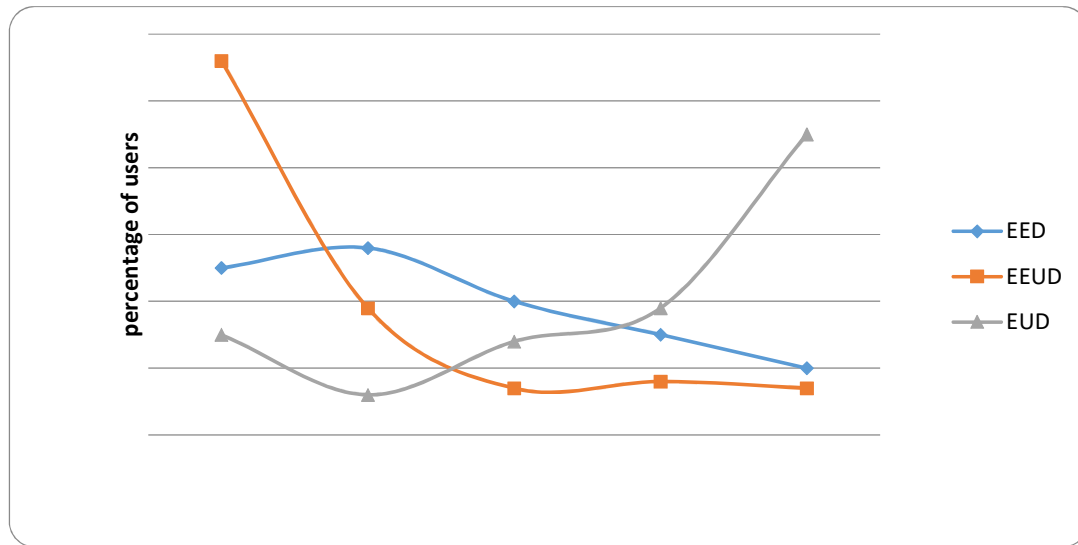


Figure 2. Frequency of the use of different types of decoding dictionaries

The graph (Figure 2) illustrates the analysis of the frequency of the uses of different kinds of dictionaries. The lines show that the frequency of the use of semi-bilingual EEUD was on the highest level, followed by monolingual EED. On the other hand, the tendency shown in the graph reveals that a bilingual EUD was used far less frequently in comparison to the two kinds of other dictionaries. The figures show that the number of students who did not use a semi-bilingual or a monolingual dictionary at all was far less than those of the users of an EUD.

#### 4.1.4. Extent of usefulness of a particular type of dictionary in learners' opinion

In order to find the usefulness of a particular kind of dictionary, the participants were asked to respond to the five options ranging from 'very useful' to 'useless'. The analysis of the participant learners' responses reveals that a majority of them believed that a semi-bilingual EEUD was useful for their studies. There were 90% (very useful=68%; useful=22%) participants who favoured this type of dictionary. Only 1% respondents considered it to be less useful for their studies. Next to the EEUD was a monolingual EED. There were 81% (very useful=50%; useful 31%) participants who considered it to be useful for their learning of English. Only 3% students considered it to be less useful, and none of the participants considered it to be useless for their learning.

On the other hand, the participants' views regarding a bilingual EUD showed that there were 40% (very useful=11%; useful=29%) users who believed it to be useful for their learning of the English language. Some 16% students believed that this type of dictionary was less useful. It is important to note that 43% participants did not respond about the usefulness of a bilingual dictionary. The analysis of comparison of the usefulness of three types of dictionaries for the participants is shown in Figure 3.



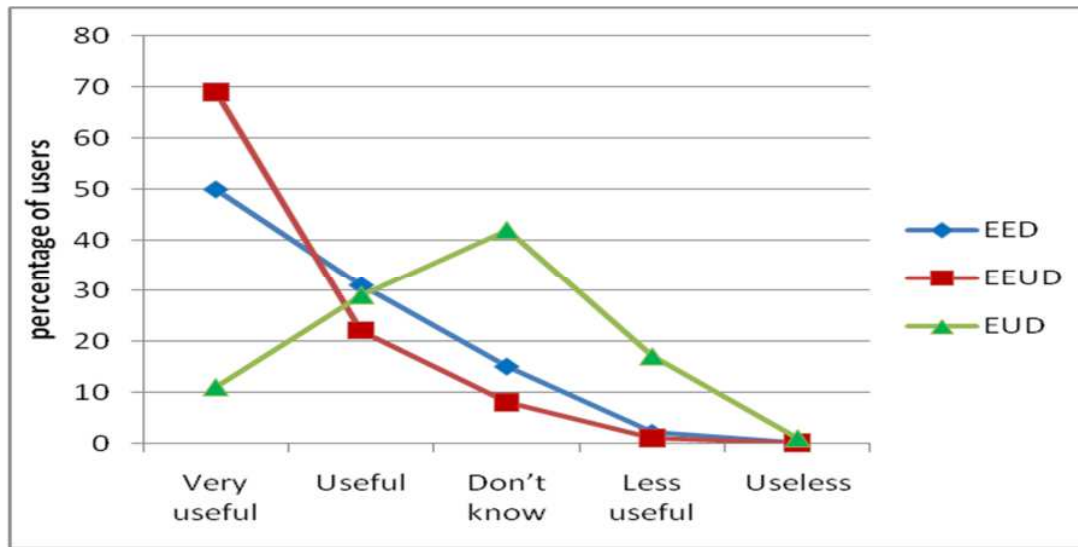


Figure 3. A comparison of students' views about the usefulness of dictionaries

The line graph (Figure 3) illustrates the participants' ratings based on their experience of using three types of decoding dictionaries. The graph reveals that 69% participants considered an EEUD to be very useful, while 50% learners believed that an EED was very useful for their learning of the English language. As far as a bilingual EUD was concerned, 11% participants considered it to be very useful. Considering the comparative analysis of the usefulness of three types of decoding dictionaries, an EEUD comes out to be the most useful dictionary.

## 4.2. Teachers' Questionnaire

This section of the paper presents analysis of the questionnaire data collected from twenty-five participant teachers. It shows teachers' choice and advice to their students to use particular type(s) of dictionaries. Teachers were also asked to give reasons of their choice. The analysis of the teachers' opinion is presented in two sections. The first section provides the analysis of their recommendation of a particular kind of dictionary. The quantitative results of their answers to the closed-ended questions are shown in the form of a line graph. The second part presents the qualitative descriptive analysis of the open-ended questions where the reasons of the teachers' choice of a particular type of dictionary have been discussed.

### 4.2.1. Teachers' choice/recommendation of a dictionary for their students

Regarding the teachers' advice to their students to use a particular kind of dictionary, ten participant teachers recommended specifically an EED, and 11 teachers preferred only an EEUD, while 4 teachers recommended both EED and EEUD for their students. None of the teachers recommended an EUD. The responses of the teachers are shown in Figure 4.

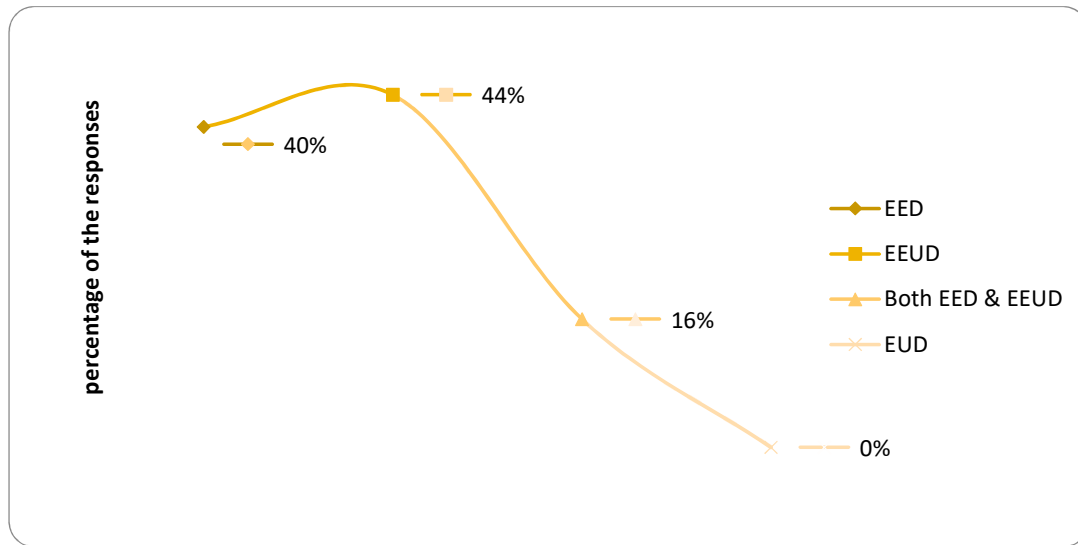


Figure 4. Teachers' preference of different types of dictionaries

The line graph (Figure 4) illustrates the choice of teachers for a particular type of decoding dictionary for their students. The graph shows that teachers mostly recommended two types of dictionaries for their students. The dictionaries preferred by them were semi-bilingual EEUD and monolingual EED. The percentage analysis presented in the graph shows that 44% responses were in favour of an EEUD, while 40% teachers chose EED. There were 16% of the participant teachers who recommended both EED and EEUD for their students.

#### 4.2.2. Teachers' reasons to recommend a particular type of dictionary

The teachers were requested to give reasons in support of their views why they recommended one or more type(s) of dictionary for their students. Their responses to the open-ended questions in favour of EED and EEUD are discussed in the following sub-sections.

##### 4.2.2.1. Teachers' views about a monolingual EED

The participant teachers who advised their students to use a monolingual EED provided a number of reasons in support of their choice. Their views are summarised in the following lines:

A monolingual EED enhances learners' capability to learn the English language. It helps develop learners' habit to think in English. It gives information about the words with examples. It uses the standardised Received Pronunciation (RP) system, which improves the learners' skill in pronunciation. It is reliable in terms of meanings. It gives synonyms of words in English which improves students' vocabulary. Teachers also believed that the use of a monolingual dictionary paved the way to learning the English language without a reference to their L1.

##### 4.2.2.2. Teachers' views about a semi-bilingual EEUD

The teachers who recommended students to use a semi-bilingual EEUD also provided reasons to support their point of view. The reasons given for their choice are summarised below:

In Pakistan, the Grammar Translation Method is predominantly exploited for teaching of the English language, and in this scenario a semi-bilingual EEUD can be more useful than a monolingual EED. A majority of the students in Pakistan call for the meanings of English words in both English and Urdu. As a semi-bilingual EEUD provides the meanings in both languages, it helps the learners to improve their understanding of English vocabulary. The learners who find it difficult to comprehend the meanings in English can understand words in Urdu. Thus, a semi-bilingual EEUD facilitates the learning of the English language.

## 5. Discussion

The analyses of the data show that learners of the English language in Pakistan used more than one dictionary. The two most preferred dictionaries were semi-bilingual EEUD and monolingual EED. A large majority of the 400 participant students made use of these types of dictionaries. Data also show that some of the participants had never used one or the other type of dictionary at all.

According to the participants' opinion, an EEUD was the most frequently used dictionary of all the three types of decoding dictionaries. After EEUD, the second most frequently used dictionary was a monolingual EED. A bilingual EUD was the least frequently used dictionary among the three dictionaries compared by the participant students of this study.

The comparison about the usefulness of the three types of decoding dictionaries shows that an EEUD was considered to be the most useful dictionary by the learners. Next to an EEUD was an EED. Majority of the users were contented with the different features of an EEUD like the structure and the provision of contents, and they also found it easy to use. A protocol study of the use of semi-bilingual EEUD conducted by Aslam, Iqbal and Choudhary (2016) also proved the usefulness of this type of dictionary.

Data collected from the teachers of the English language show that EEUD and EED are almost equally recommended. Most of the participant students used an EEUD and an EED as advised by their teachers, however, many of them also exploited an EUD to understand English words. Majority of the students regarded both EEUD and EED to be highly helpful for their learning of the English language.

## 6. Conclusion

Findings of the research reveal that, although learners of the English language exploit all three types of decoding dictionaries, a large number of them consider a semi-bilingual EEUD to be the best source of information for their studies. Along with an EEUD, the closest most preferred dictionary is an EED. The teachers' difference of opinion regarding their recommendation for a monolingual and semi-bilingual dictionary shows the difference of two schools of thought in Pakistan regarding the teaching of the English language. One of them supports the use of the Direct Method (DM) for teaching of the English language and believe that any attempt to teach English using other methods hampers the learning process. The supporters of Grammar Translation Method (GTM) think that the significance of reference to the learners' first language for teaching second or foreign language is of vital importance, and

it pertains to teaching of the English language as well. The responses of the participant teachers show the same difference of opinion. Followers of the GTM encourage and recommend the use of a dictionary which provides meanings in both the languages, i.e. English and Urdu. On the other hand, those who favour Direct Method for teaching of the English language recommend a monolingual dictionary as the basic source of information, and some of them also recommend an EEUD as an additional source for reference purposes. Majority of the learners follow their teachers' advice to use a dictionary for learning of the English language.

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